

DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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State Advisory Council on Children and Youth with Disabilities

Five Seasons Sports Club, 96th Street, Indianapolis Indiana

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Members in attendance: Bob Marra, Gary Bates, J. Bret Lewis, Carolyn Heier, David Schmidt, Becky Kirk, Brett Bollinger, Mary Ramos, Elaine Scaife, and Cathlene Hardy-Hansen.

Members absent: Rose Black, Janet Corson, Maureen Greer, Terry Huser, Marcia Johnson, Steve Luehmann, Julie Swaim, Deborah Winchester, and Kathy Wodicka.

Interpreter: Robert Tape.

Special guest: Dr. Pamela Wright, Assistant Director for Johnson County Special Services.

Division staff in attendance: Paul Ash, Susan Miner, and Sharon Knoth.

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. B. Marra introduced Dr. Wright who recently completed her doctoral dissertation on special education cooperative restructuring. P. Wright presented an overview of the study and findings for the Council.

She began by providing the Council an overview of her intended outcomes for today's discussion:

1. Understanding the history of cooperatives - why they were formed and what the original intention of them was;
2. Basic reasons for cooperative reorganization;
3. Some essential components of effective cooperatives;
4. An understanding of the foundation for developing local guidelines; and
5. An understanding of the foundation for developing the criteria for judging cooperative.

By 1971 all school districts in Indiana had to have some type of comprehensive plan which outlined how they were going to provide special education services. Schools were told by the Division of Special Education if they had less than 10,000 students in their district, they should probably join with other school districts to provide special education services. Efficiency and comprehensive services were the two major concepts considered in establishing relationships. There were three arrangements for sharing special education services: Joint Service and Supply, Special Education Cooperative, and Special Education Interlocal.

In 1975 there were 66 special education planning districts in Indiana:

16 Individual Corporations

38 Joint Service and Supply

11 Interlocals

1 Special Education Cooperative

There are currently 67 special education planning districts in Indiana, and next year (2001/2002 school year), there will be 68. Part of her study looked at the advantages and disadvantages to special education cooperatives. What she found is that for every advantage there was a disadvantage.

1. Improved cost efficiency vs. goal displacement and fiscal squabbles among corporations.
2. Avoiding "forced" consolidation vs. reduced local district autonomy.
3. Facilitation of compliance vs. conflicting roles.
4. Facilitation of staff retention vs. personnel dissatisfaction.
5. Enhancement of parental involvement vs. reduction of parental involvement.
6. Access to programs and services specialists vs. inappropriate determination of services.
7. Reaching rural areas vs. transportation.
8. Facilitation of communication among districts vs. conflicts among district members and protection of self interests.

P. Wright studied four cooperatives who had been involved in some type of reorganization discussions. She went through board minutes, interviewed staff and sat down and had numerous discussions with them. The four districts' names were changed to protect their identity. The self-descriptions provided by those she interviewed were:

Messic County Cooperative

Described themselves as the Master/Slave Agreement (eventually split apart)

Jackson-Richey Cooperative

Described themselves as the Dinosaur (eventually split apart)

Corey County Cooperative

Described themselves as the Family (made some changes but stayed together)

New Crossing Cooperative

Described themselves as the Safety Net (made some changes but stayed together)

There are some "incompatible incentives" which arise in the discussions of restructuring. For example: the school board of the "controlling district" wanted to eliminate shared programs and maintain control over all decisions; the superintendents of the small districts wanted to continue to share programs but wanted to have an equal say in decision making; one superintendent of a larger district wanted to pull out of the cooperative completely; the special education teachers wanted to remain attached to the cooperative; and the parents wanted to continue to be a part of the cooperative. P. Wright reminded the Council that there are many people involved in and effected by restructuring and their needs and concerns must be considered.

The Council then took a brief break.

D. Schmidt asked for an approval of the minutes which were distributed. B. Lewis so moved. Seconded by C. Heier. Motion carried. The Council then introduced themselves to P. Wright.

There are numerous key stakeholders in the special education cooperative arrangements: the Indiana Department of Education/Division of Special Education, the local school board, local district superintendents, local principals, local special education administrators, the special education and general education teaching staff, and parents and community members. They all influence the daily operation and ongoing activities of the cooperative. B. Lewis commented that he wanted to include the students themselves as part of that stakeholder group. P. Wright concurred and added that she found it very interesting that in some discussions, the students were never brought up.

There are several reasons for organizational Conflict: Incompatible, Unrealized Goals, or Unacceptable Rewards - equity - ownership - control - conflicting loyalties - conflicting beliefs - interpretation of compliance; Unacceptable Contributions - too much money - too much time; Decentralization; and Inclusion.

Components of Effective Cooperatives - although few cooperatives have all of these components, she did find that those which had a large majority of these were infinitely more effective. B. Bollinger asked whether there were some she believed to be more important or necessary than others. P. Wright indicated no, but for the most part, numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9 are very important. The components are:

1. Organizational structures change as needed to assist in meeting stakeholders' goals.
2. Shared beliefs and goals.
3. Individual goals were secondary to the shared beliefs that sustained the organization.
4. A planning mechanism.
5. Power was equally distributed among coop members.
6. Goals were aligned prior to implementing change.
7. Informed decision-making was fostered.
8. Local control and ownership existed.
9. Coop members shared a sense of collective responsibility.
10. Special education directors provided effective leadership.
11. Ongoing communication among all stakeholders.
12. Mutual trust.
13. Opportunities for ongoing parental input.
14. Extensive inservice training.
15. The coop board looked to the future and moved the coop in a forward direction.

The average tenure for superintendents in Indiana is 2.4 years. Although we know what effective leadership is, it is difficult if the "players" are continuously changing (both superintendents as well as school board members).

If a district is looking at restructuring, she found there were several areas to analyze and be prepared to demonstrate for the State Advisory Council:

1. Capacity - fiscal, spatial, personnel, and monetary
2. A continuum of services
3. Substantial parental input

4. Cooperative board input
5. Limited negative fiscal impact - for all districts involved
6. Substantial planning
7. Provisions for staff training
8. Provision for the exception - although a student with significant disabilities may not currently be enrolled, what provision are in place should it arise?
9. A "happy divorce"
10. Assurances of access to the general education curriculum

Her research provided several recommendations for the State Advisory Council to keep in mind (to ensure consistent decisions are made):

1. A planning mechanism must be in place at the coop level and a planning committee, including parents, local school board members, teachers, building administrators, all members of the coop board, and the coop director must be actively addressing the concerns prompting restructuring discussions.
2. The planning committee must have conceived a well-organized plan in which a continuum of services will continue to exist for all students with disabilities.
3. A contingency plan must be in place for students with significant disabilities who may move into the area.
4. A fiscal and personnel impact study must be completed and plans for re-assigning personnel put in place.
5. Staff development needs are outlined and a plan for addressing them is evident.
6. A means for informing teachers and parents of proposed changes are outlined.
7. The restructuring proposal clearly outlines the transition steps with an attached timeline.
8. All members of the coop and the local school boards are in agreement with the plan.

P. Wright indicated that districts who have a "gentleman's agreement" should formalize it and place it in writing so that as the members of the team change, the service provision agreement remains known. She also cautioned the Council that if a district meets "the criteria" then it should not matter what the size of the population they serve might be. She also cautioned that motives for restructuring should not be an issue for the Council. If a district restructures, then the Division's monitoring process should be able to ascertain whether it was a "good" or a "bad" event.

B. Marra thanked Dr. Wright for her presentation and then introduced Paul Ash. P. Ash addressed the Council to discuss the Continuous Improvement Monitoring (CIM) process currently being used by the Division. It is modeled after the Federal Government's monitoring process. There are 92 indicators which are responded to with data, results, analysis, and an indication as to whether there are plans or actions for potential improvement.

A discussion of the DRAFT of Live-Learn-Work and Play was then distributed.

D. Schmidt offered that the Division send out a copy of Dr. Wright's handout to the Council and ask them to think about what type of a template might we develop that the Division would then

distribute whenever a cooperative contacted the Division seeking potential restructuring. At the February 16, 2001 meeting the Council will review Dr. Wright's handout along with what the Division currently distributes and attempt to come up with a compilation that will be used routinely when districts attempt to restructure. D. Schmidt indicated that it is very nice and refreshing to have a doctoral dissertation that is real, applicable, and will initiate change in Indiana. B. Lewis indicated that perhaps rather than dissolve a cooperative, what the future holds is a "morph" or evolution of the cooperative.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by B. Kirk. Seconded by C. Hardy-Hansen. Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.